

Reflections of the Image

A Visual Discourse Analysis of the Rohingya People



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Abstract

The world stands often in the face of moral contentions, determining certain people or events as worthy of security whilst ignoring others. The conscience of watching silently as the genocide in Rwanda unfolded has weighed heavily on the international community's shoulders, seemingly not heavy enough to refrain from repeating the same mistake in Myanmar however. The role "the visual" plays in framing security issues is what is of interest in this thesis, as it sets out to compare and analyse the BBC's and Al Jazeera's representation of the Rohingya people between 2017-2019, with a focus on the genocide of 2017. Ten articles from each news outlet were categorised and analysed according to the analytical tools deducted from the theory of visual securitization. The results of this analysis were that Al Jazeera visually securitized the Rohingya by representing an overarching theme of suffering and individuality, constituting them as threatened and in need of immediate defence. A majority of the BBC's articles in turn did not visually securitize the Rohingya, instead representing the political implications of the genocide. These results are interpreted as reflections of the wider policy discourse.

Keywords: visual securitization, genocide, Rohingya, individuality, suffering, discourse analysis

Word count: 10135

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1. Introduction

“In this, the lesson from Rwanda is clear: international silence will be interpreted as international disinterest - removing one of the few barriers now standing between the Rohingyas and genocide” (Ibrahim 2016, 137).

The above quote was written by Azeem Ibrahim, author of “The Rohingya: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide” in the year of 2016. In late August 2017, genocide became a fact. This did not come as a surprise however, the Rohingya Muslims have been systematically oppressed for decades. The international reaction towards the murder of thousands of people, systematic mass rape, children thrown into fires and the displacement of almost a million Rohingya has been mixed (Habib et al. 2018, 68). Breaking the “silence and disinterest”, The Gambia attempted to bring Myanmar to justice as they took the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with the support of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (Alexander 2020, 2). In contrast, the global North has stood by as these human rights abuses have unfolded. The continuous discrimination the Rohingya people are subjected to are justifiably human rights abuse that *should* be acted upon to ensure their safety and wellbeing. What determines who is worthy of security?

This thesis is motivated by my interest in visual securitization theory, which describes how images interplay with spoken and written discourse to either speak security or portray something or someone as in need of immediate defence (Hansen 2011, 51). Which images are used, for what purpose and in the context of a wider policy discourse is highly relevant for our understanding of who is deemed worthy of security. The term “wider policy discourse” is used frequently throughout this thesis. It is understood as the general political understanding and framing of a certain issue. In this study, one can trace two distinct and generalised “wider policy discourses”; that of Western *inaction* towards the genocide and Muslim *reaction*. With this point of departure, this thesis aims to illustrate the effect of visuals by analysing the BBC’s and Al Jazeera’s patterns of dominant imagery and discourse to portray the Rohingya. BBC is here understood as a potential reflection of the Western inaction due to its base in the global North, Al Jazeera represents a potential reflection of the Muslim reaction due to its Muslim influences and base in the global South. Have the Rohingya been represented as worthy of security and if so, how?

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

This thesis aims firstly to analyse the constitutions and patterns of the visuals, by using the tools laid out by the analytical framework. Who is being represented? In what way? How often? Secondly, through discussing and analysing the visuals and their immediate intertextual context, this study aims to see if the BBC and Al Jazeera have made systematic choices in their representation of the Rohingya, which will give answers to the question of an eventual visual securitization. Lastly, this study will reveal how the BBC's and Al Jazeera's portrayal can help explain and reveal certain discourses that are part of the bigger picture of foreign (in)action. By comparing a news outlet based in the global North with one based in the global South, one can investigate whether the representation of the Rohingya people differs and what an eventual difference implies. To summarise, the purpose of this research is to depart from the established studies of visual securitization theory to *describe* and *analyse* the way the Rohingya have been visually and textually represented, as well as the connection to the wider policy discourse, that can *contribute* to the explanation of how the Rohingya people came to be defined as not being worthy of Western protection.

This thesis will therefore aim to answer the following research question:

How have the Rohingya been represented and potentially visually securitized in the BBC and Al Jazeera between 2017-2019?

2. Background to the Study

2.1 Myanmar and the Rohingya People

In Myanmar, which is a majority Buddhist country previously colonised by the UK, the Rohingya people have officially been stateless since 1982 due to the Citizenship Act, which deprives them of basic human rights (Alexander 2020, 2). According to the UN, the Rohingyas are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world (Ibrahim 2016). They have been systematically oppressed, vigilantly surveilled, denied health care, education and other vital human rights for more than 70 years (Ibrahim 2016, 1-ff). Human rights organisations have described Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya people as "a slow genocide" (Nationalencyklopedin n.d).

With matters as sensitive as cases of alleged genocide, there is no apparent international consensus regarding the status of the 2017 acts being genocide or not. However, a clear majority of states and organisations have chosen to condemn the events as genocide and/or ethnic cleansing. The strongest response to the genocide has been from Muslim states and leaders, if one defines strong response as demanding international legal justice. As mentioned, The Gambia has filed a lawsuit, claiming that Myanmar's military forces are responsible for killings, sexual violence, torture, the destruction of or denial of access to food, shelter and other essentials of life, all with the intent to destroy the Rohingya people, in whole or in part. On the 23rd of January 2020, the ICJ stated that: "In the Court's view, at least some of the acts alleged by The Gambia are capable of falling within the provisions of the Genocide Convention" (ICJ 2020, 2). One can see a generalised tendency from Muslim countries to react more strongly towards the genocide based on protests, condemnations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's support of the lawsuit (Nationalencyklopedin n.d). Nevertheless, human rights organisations and the media have criticised the international community, particularly the global North, for ignoring the Rohingya's plights and their lack of adequately addressing the crisis that has unfolded, allowing the violence to escalate (Ibrahim 2016, 108, 132-137).

2.2 The Spectatorship of Suffering

While conducting this study, inspiration has been deducted from Lilie Chouliaraki's work "The Spectatorship of Suffering". In the introduction of her

book, it is stated that “who we care for is a matter of whether or not their suffering is presented as relevant and worthy of our response” (Chouliaraki 2006, 14). Chouliaraki’s theoretical framework is continuously relevant as our constant clicking, scrolling and exposure to suffering on social media platforms, news websites and television is perhaps more pervading and present in our lives than ever before. How distant suffering is portrayed, reproduced and consumed affects the kinds of responses that are legitimised, which is highly relevant for this thesis (2006, 93). Depending on how the media construes the suffering, important factors such as proximity, urgency and suffering could be missing in the representation and have dire consequences for those being represented (2006, 42). In conclusion, one must analyse the news through the patterns of co-appearance and combination, rather than single pictures or sentences. These patterns are best understood as systematic semiotic choices by which the spectacle of suffering becomes meaningful to spectators in the genre of news.

2.3 Research Gap

Tying the Rohingya genocide together with visual securitization theory is motivated by the enabling, and at times disabling, effect images and discourse have on international politics. According to studies of visual securitization, it is equally important “to study when images of suffering and death *fail* to lead to a forceful international response as when they do” (Hansen et al. 2021, 3). However, stating causality in cases of visual securitization is exceedingly difficult. Confidently stating that a particular kind of image directly causes military intervention or other types of foreign policies is not feasible due to their polysemic nature, which implies that images cannot communicate independently of the discursive realm they are part of (Hansen et al. 2021, 2 & 7). Therefore this paper does not aim to find causality, instead it aims to investigate how two major news outlets have represented the Rohingya through a visual discourse analysis. In an attempt to detect a potential and generalised reflection of the wider policy discourses in this study, Al Jazeera has been used due to its Muslim influences and base in the global South and BBC due to its base in the global North. By describing and analysing this representation, I hope to reveal visual and textual discourses as well as a connection to the wider policy discourse that can *contribute* to the explanation of how the Rohingya people came to be defined as not being worthy of Western protection.

3. Analytical Framework

3.1 Visual Securitization

An analytical framework of visual securitization would be insufficient without a conceptualisation of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, which analyses how security is constructed, reacted to and acted upon. Securitization is the process of speech acts, performed most often by a political leader, defining a particular issue as in need of security or as a threat to survival, authorising emergency measures (McDonald 2008, 565). Drawing on this grand theory, visual securitization theory has developed into its own field of research, largely due to social media and the accessibility of images. The visual has a major impact on international relations and the possibility of securitizing an issue, actor and/or event. The images of the American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, mutilated and beaten to death, played a significant role in the withdrawal of American troops. Images of "The Hooded Man" not only impacted culture, as it was showcased in museums and even in Lego, it also created shock-waves over what one military official named "moral Chernobyl" (Hansen 2015, 263). The death of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian boy who was found dead on the coast of Turkey in 2015, made global headlines and swayed thousands of people's political stance. The use of visuals on social media to ignite conflict has become an important factor to take into consideration in peace and conflict studies. What images do and enable through their circulation has implications not only for the viewer, it has drastic consequences for what, or who, is being portrayed.

3.2.1 The Inter-Visual/Intertextual Model

Visual securitization's theorisation is often derived from Lene Hansen's article "Theorizing the image for Security Studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis". Hansen asserts that "to study visual securitization is therefore to engage the processes through which images come to have political implications" (Hansen 2011, 53). The article thoroughly discusses the implications of "the visual"; how one can analyse the visuals and the discourse surrounding the images, the political implications and repercussions, how visual securitization differs from the "classical" linguistic securitization and more. The theory Hansen lays out is that of an inter-visual/intertextual model consisting of (1) the immediate intertextual context, (2) the wider policy discourse, (3) the constitutions of the image as well as (4) the visual itself (2011, 51-54, 69). The model theorises the way images communicate by situating them in their spoken

and written discourse, as well as how they are, or are not, responded to (2011, 53). Hansen lays forward three specifications of the image: immediacy, circulability and ambiguity. In short, immediacy implies identification and authentication, circulability are the images' ability to reach many people quickly and ambiguity implies that images are polysemic. These three features of visuals create a different securitization than the purely textual one (2011, 55-58). Hansen illustrates the importance of incorporating the power of visuals in securitizing studies, as visuals can be read by *all* (Hansen 2011, 54-ff). Images can 'speak security' through a variety of depictions, for example demonizing, ridiculing and/or showing suffering, which is relevant to understand the kind of politics that is being communicated and allowing different types of securitizations to take place, compared to the exclusively linguistic process (2011, 51).

To summarise the tools this thesis has integrated from Hansen's article, one may begin with the inter-visual/intertextual model, which has enabled the analysis of the potential visual securitization in the respective news outlet. The arguments put forward in Hansen's article legitimises the choice to analyse media's visual securitization, as news outlets have a large outreach, they are "read by all" and they potentially use different strategies of depiction to communicate different kinds of politics, which affects how the response is invoked or expected. Lastly, Hansen defines visual securitization in the article, i.e "when images constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defence or when securitizing actors argue that images 'speak security'"(2011, 51), which has been used as the foundation of this study's analysis.

3.2.2 The "Identifiable Victim Effect"

The article "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees" by Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison and Xzarina Nicholson presents the findings from a content analysis of how Australian newspapers' front page visually represented refugees during the early 2000s. The conclusion to their study was that only 6% of the images of asylum seekers were of individuals, whereas a majority pictured the refugees in large or medium groups. When they viewed the percentage of images that is most likely to evoke compassion, images of a single refugee with clearly recognisable facial features, only 2% of the images were found to be of this crucial constitution. The choice of using images that depicted large groups with no visible facial features framed refugees as a threat to sovereignty and security. According to the authors, the dehumanising visual patterns in the newspapers reinforced a politics of fear, which in turn did not generate a compassionate political response (Bleiker et al. 2013, 398 & 404-405).

The article lays forward several important analytical tools that are necessary to use in this thesis. Firstly, it states the vast influence images have, due to the quick and tactical overview of issues and events people receive through them. Images can shape emotional attitude and the degree of compassion that will be felt

towards the issue, determining whose lives are deemed important and whose are not. The conditions of possibility are therefore enabled by images, as they determine “what can and cannot be seen and, indirectly, what can and cannot be thought” (2013, 400). The xenophobic response to the refugees in Australia illustrates a reciprocal effect, as the images influenced what could be said in public as well as what was said in public was reflected in the images (2013, 400). Secondly, the authors reveal how systematic representations, i.e the frequency of certain genres of images, are patterns which showcase “how dominant imagery emotionally frames political discussions on the issue” (2013, 399). Thirdly, the article draws on previous research to further the argument of how close-up portraits, with recognisable facial features, are the images that are most likely to evoke compassion, the so-called “identifiable victim effect”. These images create “a more powerful emotional stimulus than a statistical victim”, meaning that an individual image and/or story can create more of a securitizing effect than representing hundreds of people at risk (2013, 408). In line with Chouliaraki’s work, this study of visual securitization states that the dehumanising visual patterns of representing masses of people creates emotional distance and established political discussions which were not in the refugees favour (2013, 413).

To summarise how the arguments put forward in this article are relevant for this thesis, it is argued that images “lie at the heart of how we see and understand the world” (2013, 413). This means that images can determine whether events, actors and/or issues are worthy of action, compassion and other political consequences. The constitutions of the image are highly important as well as the language that accompanies the images. Public and political attitudes are formed by the visual and textual representation in media, likewise the media is influenced by public and political attitudes. Lastly, the authors encourage the awareness of image’s performative power, to be able to navigate difficult political and ethical responsibilities (2013, 413), such as the Rohingya crisis.

3.2.3 The Feminist Lens

This section of the analytical framework is based on the article “Gender, visibility and violence: visual securitization and the 2001 war in Afghanistan” by Matthew Kearns. According to this study, the use of images of Afghan women, alongside media texts and foreign policy discourse, legitimised and enabled the Bush administration’s war in Afghanistan. Kearns demonstrates how feminist theory should be synthesised with visual securitization theory, as it illustrates “how gender can work through the interplay between text/image to enable a successful visual securitization” (2017, 502). The connections between gender, security and the visual can highlight how certain political responses are allowed and others disallowed. An example of this was using images which portrayed Afghan women in a neocolonial role of “feminine victim in need of rescue”, together with media texts and foreign policy discourse, to mobilise support for the intervention (2017,

493). The findings of the study illustrated that visual securitization was dependent on gender, which in turn is determined by the frequency and strength of particular gendered and/or neocolonial representations. The strategy of depiction matters, in this case tactically and systematically using images of the “powerless” Muslim woman in need of Western “help”. The visuals convey and determine what can be understood by the audience, which is why it is important to ask how images are comprehended through their interaction with textual discourse, to constitute certain actors and issues as worthy of security (2017, 493-494).

Applying a feminist and postcolonial lens to a case of visual securitization is particularly important in this thesis, due to the colonial past of Myanmar as well as the frequent use (or abuse) of gender in processes of visual securitization. This study illuminates the importance of analysing specific representations and patterns of dominant imagery.

3.2 My Angle of Approach

To summarise the analytical framework’s contribution to this thesis, one may begin with Hansen’s model. In all studies of visual securitization, the importance of the immediate intertextual context and the wider policy discourse is emphasised, as images alone are too ambiguous to ‘speak security’. One must situate the images in their intertextuality and inter-visibility, which implies viewing who, or what, is represented, how they are depicted and the strength and prevalence of said representations. Analysing the constitutions of visuals is of importance, as dominant patterns of imagery can either enable or hinder a successful visual securitization. The lack of the identifiable victim in Australian newspapers, the gendered and neocolonial images of Muslim women alongside American foreign policy and the conceptualisation of visual securitization through the “Muhammed Cartoon Crisis” all contribute to the lens I have applied whilst analysing BBC’s and Al Jazeera’s visual and textual representation of the Rohingya.

4. Method

This thesis investigates how images work together with textual discourse to produce certain actors, events and issues as matters of security. In doing so, both the visual and the textual have been systematically analysed and categorised using a visual discourse analysis, based on Hansen's theoretical framework (Hansen 2011).

4.1 Material and Demarcation

The material for this study is a qualitative *sample* of BBC's and Al Jazeera's most relevant articles within the time interval 2017-2019. The articles were chosen from the respective news outlets' own search engines, using the words "Rohingya genocide". By using the websites' own tools of "most relevant", the top ten articles (with available visuals and text) were chosen respectively from BBC's and Al Jazeera's own ranking of articles, that were published between 2017-2019. The ranking of the articles was not according to date. The time limit is motivated by the escalation of violence that resulted in the 2017 genocide and the lawsuit that was filed towards Myanmar in 2019 by The Gambia, as well as a need for demarcation. The choice of the keywords "Rohingya genocide" is motivated by the understanding that the BBC's and Al Jazeera's representation would most likely use words such as "Rohingya", "genocide" and/or "ethnic cleansing" due to their status of being highly respected, internationally recognised news outlets. Therefore it was deemed most reasonable to use the chosen keywords. The genocide and the (in)action towards the "events" is among what is of interest in this study, motivating the choice furthermore. Only using the keyword "Rohingya" would have given results that are not demarcated enough to conduct this study.

The choice of news outlets is motivated by their circulability, their status of being internationally recognised, the interest in an eventual difference between the global South and North's representation and their presumed reflection of the wider policy discourse. The BBC is a British newspaper, which is of relevance due to the fact that Myanmar was colonised by the United Kingdom. As I aim, among other things, to illustrate if one can see neocolonial logics in the semiotic choices, this is important to note. Al Jazeera was chosen due to its outreach as well as my interest in how the visual representation and possible securitization can be affected by Muslim influences and the "base" in the global South. The visuals cannot be included in this thesis due to copyright reasons.

BBC	Al Jazeera
Rohingya crisis: The Gambia accuses Myanmar of genocide at top UN court (2019)	What's happening in Myanmar is genocide (2017)
Could Aung San Suu Kyi face Rohingya genocide charges? (2017)	Gambia files Rohingya genocide case against Myanmar at UN court (2019)
Could Aung San Suu Kyi face Rohingya genocide charges? (2017)	Genocide Day': Thousands of Rohingya rally in Bangladesh camps (2019)
Myanmar says 'no evidence' of Rohingya genocide (2017)	Myanmar rejects UN findings in Rohingya genocide report (2018)
Myanmar Rohingya: Suu Kyi rejects genocide claims at UN court (2019)	UN investigator says Myanmar genocide against Rohingya 'ongoing' (2018)
Myanmar Rohingya: How a 'genocide' was investigated. BBC (2018)	Bangladesh FM: violence against Rohingya 'is genocide' (2017)
Myanmar Rohingya: Suu Kyi to defend genocide charge at UN court (2019)	Genocide card': Myanmar Rohingya verification scheme condemned (2019)
Aung San Suu Kyi: How a peace icon ended up at a genocide trial (2019)	UN: Myanmar should be investigated for crimes against Rohingya (2018)
Rare look at Myanmar military celebrations (2019)	India's Rohingya shame (2019)

Overview of the articles' titles and year they were published.

4.2 Operationalisation

Visual securitization is operationalised according to Hansen's definition: "when images constitute something or someone as threatened and in need of immediate defence or when securitizing actors argue that images 'speak security'" (Hansen 2011, 51). News outlets are here understood as securitizing actors as their systematic portrayal of the Rohingya can argue for or against that images 'speak security', both explicitly and implicitly. It is important to assert that news outlets do not have "securitizing power" the way states do (Kearns 2017, 498). It is assumed that political authorities, such as states or the UN, are necessary for a visual securitization to enable, for example, an intervention (Hansen 2011, 53). However, as the analytical framework has shown, news outlets have the power to influence political attitudes and conditions of possibility by determining what is being seen. Therefore, they are understood as securitizing actors in this thesis.

To discover if the news outlets' representation corresponds to the definition of visual securitization, Hansen's inter-visual/intertextual model was used when analysing the articles; firstly analysing the visuals themselves (including their constitutions), secondly the immediate textual discourse they are situated in and lastly comparing the findings with the wider policy discourse. Alongside the model, the tools and arguments from the analytical framework have been used to

analyse patterns of dominant imagery, the prevalence of identifiable faces and potential gendered and/or neocolonial logics.

Three categories were made to comprehend the findings: 1) visual securitization is intelligible. The visual and textual discourse clearly constitutes the Rohingya as threatened and in need of immediate defence 2) the article visually securitizes the Rohingya to a *certain extent* 3) the article does not visually securitize the Rohingya. These categories have in turn certain criteria. Articles that visually securitize the Rohingya are defined by their use of visuals with recognisable faces, especially of women and children. The textual discourse focuses on the urgency of the situation for the Rohingya and uses names, ages and quotes to depict their stories. Factors such as immediacy, individuality and suffering are clearly present. The second category of articles is defined by a visual and textual discourse that gives the reader a *mixed* sense of the Rohingya people as referent objects of security. The articles have partially or mainly focused on representing other issues or aspects of the “events” than the dire situation for the Rohingya people, ‘speaking security’ to a certain extent. They share a common denominator of portraying the Rohingya from a dual perspective, using (for example) close-up images or detailed stories of the atrocities *as well as* images and text focusing on other aspects, such as the international political scene from Myanmar’s perspective. The article in whole gives a mixed sense of ‘speaking security’. The last category lacks visuals and text entirely that represent the Rohingya as in need of security/immediate defence or to an extent that crucial factors such as immediacy, individuality and/or suffering are missing.

4.2.1 The Visuals

The questions that were asked while analysing the visuals were the following:

Constitutions of the image:

- Are the Rohingya’s faces identifiable?
- With what proximity are the photos taken?
- Who, or what, is represented?

Patterns of dominant imagery:

- How many of the images are of men, women and/or children?
- How many images are of a mass of unidentifiable people?
- Are particular representations prevalent (for example suffering)?

The visuals were then categorised according to their constitutions.

Videos

- What do the videos depict?
- Who do they represent and how?
- Do they incorporate the Rohingya themselves through interviews?

- Do the videos ‘speak’ immediacy, identification and/or suffering?

The videos in the articles were categorised according to the same criteria as the articles (1-3) and then summarised in chapter 5.3.

4.2.2 The Textual Discourse

Discourse analysis has been used to identify recurring linguistic signs. While reading the articles, the questions that have been asked are:

- Is the focus on the Rohingya people’s dire situation? If not, what is being textually represented?
- Are individuals’ stories represented?
- Has the article used numbers and/or names to portray the events?
- Is there a pattern of dominant textual representation?

The textual discourse of the article was summarised and interpreted together with the visuals in the specific article to correctly categorise the article in whole.

4.3 Limitations

A limitation to this thesis is the potential confirmation bias due to the use of the keywords “Rohingya genocide” in the news outlets’ search engines. The choice of using these keywords is motivated by the fact of several states, news outlets and international organisations having used the term “genocide” and finding evidence of genocidal intent and acts. Using these keywords was deemed most reasonable for these specific news outlets, as they would presumably use the same terms as the international community. The keywords were also used to demarcate the study, as the contentions surrounding the Rohingya people span over decades. Lastly, as this thesis aims to illustrate the connection between visuals and the wider policy discourses regarding the genocide specifically, the choice of keywords was deemed reasonable.

Another limitation is the ambiguity of the visuals. An example of this is videos, which can depict a range of actors, issues and events, both portraying for example individuals and a distant mass of people. Furthermore, the visuals could at times ‘speak security’ whilst the textual discourse they were situated in portrayed contradicting messages, complicating the comprehension and categorisation. Therefore this type of visual and textual discourse was understood as “mixed”, visually securitizing the Rohingya to a *certain extent*. This categorisation was conducted through my personal understanding of the sum of the article, presumably leading to low inter-rater reliability of the study.

5. Findings

5.1 Al Jazeera

5.1.1 First Category - Visually Securitizing

The first article in the top ten findings uses one image, a close-up portrait of women, children and men standing behind a wooden barrier. A majority of the faces are recognisable, all of them with neutral expressions. The article was written by an international human rights lawyer, stating that out of five genocidal acts outlined in the Genocide Convention, the Myanmar government has engaged in at least four of them. The following refugee crisis is also described as “the greatest refugee crisis of the 21st century”. The article states that the treatment of the Rohingya people “has the makings to become the most significant humanitarian catastrophe since the Rwandan genocide”. Written in 2017, the author states that the present crisis is “the most extreme and disproportionate onslaught of violence”, declaring that gang rapes, beheadings and tossing babies in fires have taken place. A discussion of the international inaction towards the Rohingya is conducted, criticising the UN and states for not using the term genocide. The article compares the Hutu’s use of the radio with the use of social media in Myanmar, to demonise the Rohingya people. The author ends the article with the statement that the international community has favoured inaction and that the only word to describe the “Rohingya experience” is that of genocide (Starr Kinseth 2017).

The third-ranked article has incorporated the same video two times, depicting several close up videos of children, women and men walking through the refugee camp, men in prayer, women holding prayer beads and children staring deeply into the camera. A close-up and personal interview with Noor Hossain, Rohingya refugee, is conducted who tells his story of the hardships he has been through and the family members he has lost. Nazir Hossain, another refugee, is able to tell his personal story of the third time he has fled to Bangladesh, wanting to return home if the government accepts their terms. The video ends with the journalist saying that “what they want is to be officially recognised as Rohingya, as citizens of Myanmar, with rights, freedom of movement and security. What they want is to go back home” over close-up videos of children in the camp, looking seriously into the camera (02:31). The article was published on the 25th of August 2019, marking two years since what the Rohingya call “Genocide Day”. The text describes the “peaceful gathering” of approximately 200,000 Rohingya at a refugee camp in Bangladesh, using quotes from the protesters. The article details

the “scene”, using descriptions such as “Children, hijab-wearing women and men wearing long lungis...” and the names and ages of the people who were quoted. One woman is quoted with “tears rolling down her cheeks” saying that she is there to “...seek justice for the murder of my two sons”. The article illustrates the severity of the refugee crisis and the issues with repatriation, as they are too afraid to return. The text ends with describing the UN’s recommendation of prosecuting military commanders on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity as well as quoting the UN on their statement of the Rohingya crisis as a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”. Lastly, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Missions (IFFM) reported that systematic rape has been used as a war crime with the intent to commit genocide, ending with an emotional quote remembering and honouring those who were killed (Al Jazeera 2019).

The fifth-ranked article presents a close-up image of two men, staring into the camera with concerned expressions. The article contains a short video, named “Genocidal Intent: UN says Myanmar military leaders must face prosecution”, depicting videos from the chairmen of the IFFM, representing their report at the UN headquarter in Geneva. Whilst a journalist speaks of the “conservative estimate” of 10,000 Rohingya people being killed, an evacuated village on fire, distant videos of a mass of people walking towards the camera, and drone shots of the refugee camp are played. It is mentioned that gang rape, enslavement and the killing of children have presumably taken place according to the UN. Mohammed Jamjoom, a journalist employed at Al Jazeera, is filmed walking through the camp, whilst children stand in the background. Jamjoom mentions that the Rohingya are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world, saying that they “have grown accustomed to the international community ignoring their plight” (01:32). Chekufa, a Rohingya activist, is interviewed in front of a board of rights they wish to be implemented, telling that despite the presence of international organisations, no solutions have been implemented. She tells of a recent demonstration marking the one year anniversary of “Genocide Day”, where many women participated. The videos of the demonstration show women and young girls shouting and holding signs demanding justice. The last clip of the video depicts Muhibullah, another activist, saying that he hopes “no other countries go through what we went through” (02:47). The text accompanying the image and video tells of the IFFM’s statements regarding the atrocities, stating that “it is an ongoing genocide that is taking place”. It is mentioned that Myanmar rejects the 440-page IFFM report, declaring that it is biased. Myanmar’s denials and the difficulty of them not being signatories to ICC, in addition to a likely Security Council veto from China and Russia is mentioned. The article ends with a quote from a UN special investigator on human rights in Myanmar criticising Aung Sun Suu Kyi and the government for this “apartheid situation” and their lack of democratic actions (Al Jazeera 2018).

The sixth-ranked article has two images, the first of a young man, carrying bags and a child on his shoulder, with the child being the main focus of the image. The second image is of a map of Asia that depicts the estimated numbers of Rohingya

refugees in various countries. It also includes three videos, the first of them depicting refugees walking across paddy fields, women and men carrying small children and bags. The journalist in the video comes across a group of men, their bare feet covered in mud, telling their story of escaping Myanmar but having to return to look for their lost family members. A close up of a woman, carrying her baby on her chest, trying to balance in the mud is shown, and then children doing the same. Nur Muhamed, a refugee, is interviewed with tears streaming down his face, his children standing behind him in the mud, telling Al Jazeera of losing his eldest daughter and the torture they have endured. Several close-up shots of children with dried mud on their faces and bodies are shown, ending the video with them walking away to the journalist saying that “the struggle seems far from over as they start their new life, as refugees” (02:26). The second video begins with an interview with a woman, many children sitting around her as she begs for help to feed her three children. Close-up shots of the children with dried mud on their bare feet are shown as the journalist translates that her husband did not make it. Another woman is interviewed, telling of her husband and son who were killed in the violence. The video interviews three people in total, showing several videos of the many children in the camp. Close-up shots of children, men and women taking shelter from the rain are used whilst the journalist tells of the hunger they are experiencing and how they despite this, are happy to be there as they escaped the dangers of Myanmar. The last video is an “Inside Story”, the majority of the video being of a news anchor interviewing three people with expertise on the situation. The twenty-five minute long video is of the interviewees’ opinions, trying to nuance the issue from different perspectives, which were mainly in support of the Rohingya. The “Inside Story” showed videos of women, children and men sleeping on the sides of the road as well as clips of Indonesian Muslims protesting and holding signs of “Save Muslim Rohingya”. One of the interviewees stated that Myanmar’s action resembles that of the uprising of Auschwitz (23:39). The text accompanying these three videos and two images tells of Bangladesh’s foreign minister stating that a genocide is being waged in Rakhine state, using the international community’s condemnation of the genocide as support (Al Jazeera 2017).

The eighth article incorporated an image of a group of young and old men huddling around a phone in the middle. Faces are recognisable. The article is composed of quotes from four individuals, ages ranging from 19 to 65. The article depicts their reactions to Suu Kyi appearing at the ICJ in December 2019, to defend her country from the genocide allegations. The quotes are emotional, detailed, stating ages and names, all of them having lost children, spouses and/or other family members, all emphasising desire for justice and anger towards Suu Kyi and the military. An example of this is Momtaz Begum, telling of how the army raped her, murdered her husband and stabbed her six-year-old daughter in the head. The quote ends with “Why did they kill our innocent people, our kids? Why did they torture and rape our women? We demand justice”. Jamalida Begum is quoted telling of how she was raped and her demand for justice, for “the

punishment of those who raped us, killed our people, torched our houses, threw our children into the fire” (Al Jazeera 2019).

The ninth article of the sample uses a close-up image of two young men carrying a presumably wounded man between them. A twenty-five minute long video named “Brides to Brothels - The Rohingya Trade” is also included in the article. The video is of detailed and personal interviews with women and girls in the camp, beginning with 15-year old Fatima who is getting married against her will. The second part is of a mother, crying during the interview, telling the story of how her daughter was abducted. The last interview is with a 14-year old girl, describing how she was forced into prostitution. Alongside the emotional interviews, the video includes clips of refugees on their way to Bangladesh, an anonymous “pimp” saying that his customers “prefer newly arrived Rohingya girls, preferably very young as well” (20:32) and a close-up video of a young boy seemingly covered in blood. The article is of the discussion if a genocide has taken place or not, the majority of the article quoting people who state that Myanmar has committed ethnic cleansing and genocidal acts, demanding justice. It is also briefly summarised how many have fled, how many have died and the evidence of villages being destroyed (Al Jazeera 2018).

The tenth-ranked article is written by the same author as the first article. The image incorporated in the article is of a young girl, looking out from behind her family’s shack in New Delhi. Starr Kinseth writes in detail how expulsions, arbitrary arrests, denial of fundamental human rights such as work, education, shelter and sanitation are commonplace for most Rohingya residing in India. The author incorporates quotes and describes their dire situation vividly, warning of hate crimes and extremist rhetoric that is similar to that of Myanmar’s. After the 2017 genocide, fear of another Rohingya influx spurred extremist rhetoric leading to an “identify and kill” movement, which further puts Rohingya people at the hands of aggressive nationalism and Islamophobia (Starr Kinseth 2019).

5.1.2 Second Category - “Mixed” Messages

The fourth article in the sample uses one image of three women, two of them with a young child on their hip and a teenage girl standing in the middle. In the background one can see their precarious homes in the refugee camp. The text represents the denial from the government of Myanmar of all allegations of having perpetrated a genocide, using quotes from Zaw Htay, a senior spokesman for the government. Htay argues that the UN and other international agencies have made false allegations and that Myanmar has “zero tolerance for human rights violations”. In contrast, Marzuki Darusman who is the chairman of the FFM, is quoted as saying that victim accounts were “amongst the most shocking human rights violations” he had seen and they would “leave a mark on all of us for the rest of our lives”. It is mentioned that the FFM’s assessment could meet the legal

definition used for genocide in places such as Rwanda, Bosnia and the Darfur region (Al Jazeera 2018).

The seventh-ranked article begins with a close-up image of a young girl, holding what seems to be a “National Verification Card” (NVC). Two other images are included in this article, one of a distant mass of people with unrecognisable faces, sitting on a hillside with umbrellas shading them from the sun. The third image is of a document of the Rohingya’s demands for repatriation. Two short videos are included, the first of them beginning with an interview with Muhammad Yonouse, a refugee, who shows films of his village being burned down. He tells of the military opening fire randomly and how they had to run for their lives. Another refugee is interviewed, telling his story of returning to his home to try to salvage it from the fire after the military had left. Eventually he fled to Bangladesh, saying that he has “lived in sadness for two years now” (1:27). The second video is the same that was used in article three. The text goes into detail on how the NVC process is conducted by the Myanmar government to erase the Rohingya’s identity, stripping them of basic rights. Quotes from Rohingya people are incorporated, a man stating that he was “...beaten everywhere - my head, back, chest, and all over my body”. Khin Muang, co-founder of the Rohingya Youth Association, is quoted as saying that they are indigenous, not foreigners and “the NVC is a genocide card”, claiming that “the Myanmar government is trying to destroy the Rohingya community with this card” (Al Jazeera 2019).

5.1.3 Third Category - Non-securitizing

The video in the second article, named “Has the world failed Rohingya Muslims”, is mainly of a news anchor interviewing three experts on the Rohingya who are deemed to be pro-Rohingya. The Rohingya people themselves were not interviewed. Footage of villages on fire, drone shots of masses of people emigrating with unrecognisable faces, the refugee camps and other “distant” clips are shown. The image that is used in the article is of a military official’s back, with a mass of Rohingya people blurred out in the background. Faces are not recognisable. The text in this article is relatively short, objective and focused mainly on the process of The Gambia filing the case of genocide. The article presents the international happenings regarding this case in a statistical way, using numbers to present how many have fled to Bangladesh yet no numbers regarding how many have died. Both criticism towards Myanmar and the FFM are textually represented (Al Jazeera 2019).

5.2 BBC

5.2.1 First Category - Visually Securitizing

The first article in this category is article number three, which included four videos and three images. The images are of Suu Kyi, a close-up image of women and children holding each other in a refugee camp and of military general Min Aung Hlaing, head of Myanmar's forces. The first video is of Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, saying that he appealed to Suu Kyi to end the military operations and that it is plausible that Myanmar could be convicted of genocidal crimes. The second video warns of distressing scenes as a woman recounts explicitly the sexual violence she was subjected to. As she shows the scars on her throat, she tells with tears in her eyes of how a soldier murdered her infant son by throwing him onto the ground. A father and son are then interviewed in the camp, the father breaking into tears when he says that his child cries for his mother (01:28), who was murdered as well as their three daughters. The third video is of refugees fleeing to Myanmar, Clive Myrie (journalist) introducing the viewer to "the world's fastest-growing humanitarian crisis" (00:16). Myrie interviews people on their way, asking them what has happened in Myanmar. Infants and children are zoomed in on as the Rohingya tell of the atrocities they witnessed, seeing "many dead people, their heads and limbs chopped off" (00:33). The last video briefly summarises what Suu Kyi has said throughout the years about the country's ethnic and religious tensions. Throughout the video she avoids saying "Rohingya", speaking instead of democratic values and promises for a better future. The text accompanying these videos and images gives the reader an overview of the international debate and cautiousness around defining something as genocide, as it is regarded as the "crime of crimes". The journalist has personally heard the descriptions of the atrocities, naming mass rapes and massacres as examples (Rowlatt 2017).

The fourth-ranked article, called "Myanmar says 'no evidence' of Rohingya genocide", has one image and two videos. The image is of a group of people, sitting on the ground, with military officials standing around them. Their faces are visible, many of them expressing concern. The first video was filmed by a police officer, filming his colleagues beating young Rohingya boys who were then rounded up and believed to have been detained. The second video, called "Who are the Rohingya", interviews two women, telling of the horrors they have experienced, such as losing family members and seeing their homes burned to the ground. The video has also used the Rohingya's own clips of charred bodies and their villages burning. The video ends with clips of "Nobel Peace Prize winner" Suu Kyi and crying Rohingya people, the narrator telling the viewer that the situation is dire for the Rohingya. The text in this article states Myanmar's denial of genocide allegations as well as a short overview of the situation and the history of Rohingya oppression (BBC 2017).

The sixth article of the sample has three images and one video. The first image is a close-up of a group of men, women and children desperately reaching upwards and towards the camera, some of them seemingly shouting. The second image is of a woman, face hidden, seemingly playing with sand. The third image is of Christopher Sidoti, one of the investigators of the FFM. The video is named “Rohingya girls in danger: The stories of three young women”. Precisely as in the video in Al Jazeera’s ninth article, a story of three women is depicted, beginning with a teenage bride who is pregnant with her first child. Secondly, a crying mother tells the story of how her daughter was abducted. Lastly, “the teenage sex worker” tells of how much she misses life in Myanmar and how her work will destroy her. The video ends with clips of children in the refugee camp, the caption saying that “The fear is that these children will be forgotten” (03:10). The text in this article represents the evidence of the FFM, mentioning gang rapes, assault of children, statistics regarding villages burning down and how their 875 interviews were conducted. The remaining text in the article quotes Mr. Sidoti on who is accused, what the “next step” should be (holding the military officials and Suu Kyi accountable) and that none of the investigators “thought the evidence for genocide would be as strong as it was”, as the army’s intent to destroy the minority is argued to be clear (Hughes 2018).

5.2.2 Second Category - “Mixed” Messages

The first article of BBC’s sample included three short videos and one image of Abubacarr M Tambadou, The Gambia’s minister of justice, who is leading the lawsuit. The first video shows Rohingya people in prayer, zoomed out videos of masses of people walking through the camp, close-ups of shopping and an interview with Minar Begum, telling of her small business saying that they are better off “...here than in Myanmar” (00:40). Videos of happy children reciting songs are shown when the video turns to men in prayer, with a caption saying that “a fear of violence back at home still haunts many Rohingya” (01:06). The second video is of the reconstruction and redevelopment of Rakhine state, two years after the alleged genocide. Nick Beake, journalist for the BBC, stands in front of newly built houses whilst saying that the reality is that no Rohingya Muslims will be living here, due to the fact that they are in Bangladesh. Other displaced families, mainly Hindus, are interviewed saying that they are afraid of Rohingya Muslims, as they have “killed so many Hindus” (01:26). The last video begins with an image of shouting men, holding signs saying “Burma’s Genocide is the shame of Buddhism”. The video alternates between images of maps, interviews with two women describing the atrocities they have been subjected to, videos of soldiers beating young men, satellite images of destroyed villages, Suu Kyi, and women and children with saddened expressions. Captions such as “But Bangladesh, like several other countries, doesn’t want the refugees” (01:29) are shown to the viewer. The text describes the reasons for The Gambia’s lawsuit, Myanmar’s denial of the charges and describing “who the Rohingya are” by briefly stating their oppression, the Rohingya militants’ attack on police posts that triggered the

“clearance operations” and the following refugee influx to Bangladesh (BBC 2019).

The eighth article begins with an image of a young woman with what is assumed to be her child in her lap. They are sitting on a blanket on the ground, with their makeshift home visible in the background. The second image is of a woman, half of her face visible, peeking out between bars that make up a wall of her home in a refugee camp. The third image is of army chief Min Aung Hlaing, the caption saying that his Facebook account was banned. The video in the article is of celebrity Cate Blanchett, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, speaking out against the Myanmar government in an interview. Blanchett encourages the government to give Rohingya citizenship as videos of her visiting a refugee camp, handing out food, watching children sing in a classroom, talking to women with babies and sitting among a large group of children are played. Blanchett says at the end of the video that “even though we talk about the numbers, it is important we don’t lose sight of the human beings” (01:30). The text repeats that Myanmar has rejected the UN accusations, what the Rohingya have been subjected to and mentions the tensions that arose due to Facebook banning Myanmar’s military pages (BBC 2018).

5.2.3 Third Category - Non-securitizing

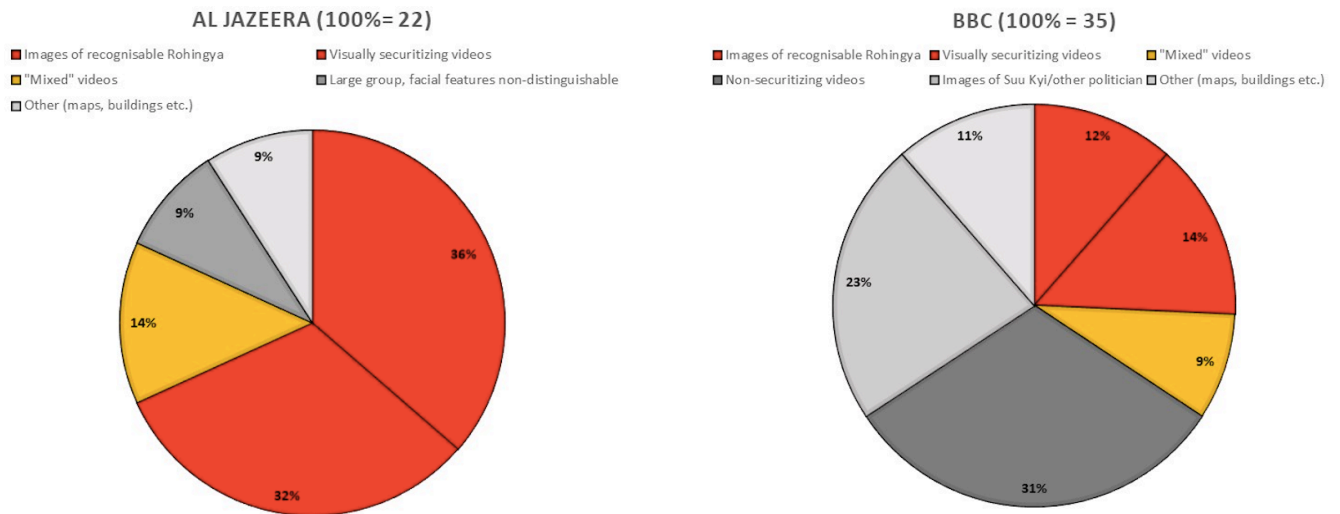
The second article is a twenty-two second long video of Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in an interview with BBC. In the video he answers the question if Suu Kyi could face Rohingya genocide charges. The text in the article states who al-Hussein is and that he doesn’t rule out genocide charges (BBC 2017).

The fifth article begins with depicting Suu Kyi and her rejection of genocide claims at the ICJ in 2019. It has included three videos and two images. The first video is a part of Suu Kyi’s speech at the ICJ, defending her and Myanmar, stating that the allegations were “incomplete and incorrect”. The second video, asking “How a peace icon like Suu Kyi can end up at a genocide trial”, begins with a description of what Myanmar is accused of, showing relatively distant videos of refugees. The journalist tells of how The Gambia, on behalf of dozens of other Muslim countries, filed the lawsuit with videos of Muslim men protesting the violence. The video alternates between the journalist telling the “story” of Myanmar and the Rohingya, clips from the refugee camp and of Suu Kyi. The first image in the article is a close-up image of a woman with a sticker on her cheek of Suu Kyi and the words “Together Forever”, who helped organise a pro-Myanmar demonstration in support of Suu Kyi. The woman is quoted saying that “We support her and still believe in her. She is the only person who can bring about peace and prosperity in our country and resolve this very complicated situation”. The second image is of ICJ’s headquarters in Hague. The third video is of an empty transit camp, built on land that used to be a Rohingya village. The

article's text gives an easily understood overview of why The Gambia has filed the case, what the accusations are, the mixed reaction towards Suu Kyi as well as her defiance to the allegations despite having listened to three hours of horrific testimony (the testimony is however not incorporated or described). The article ends with stating "the current situation for the Rohingya", which tells of how many refugees have fled to Bangladesh and Bangladesh's plan to relocate and return the Rohingya (BBC 2019). The seventh-ranked article is almost identical to the fifth, published only a day before. The seventh article has not incorporated Suu Kyi's speech at the ICJ, instead an image of a billboard in Myanmar of Suu Kyi and the caption "We Stand With You" is incorporated (BBC 2019). The ninth article uses the same video that is incorporated in both the fifth and seventh article, called "Aung San Suu Kyi: How a peace icon ended up at a genocide trial". The text in this article is short, giving context to the video by stating that "Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi used to be seen as a symbol of human rights, and spent years under house arrest for promoting democracy". It describes in a short paragraph that she has defended Myanmar against the genocide charges (BBC 2019).

The last article depicts Myanmar's military celebrations to mark the "Armed Forces Day". The only mention of the Rohingya in the text is to state that UN investigators have accused the military of committing genocide against Rohingya Muslims. The video in this article is of the military parade, the captions in the video comparing the size of the parade to the amount of Rohingya people they are accused of murdering. No videos of the Rohingya people are included (BBC 2019).

5.3 Summary



The red area of the pie charts constitutes the clearly securitizing *visuals*, orange “mixed” and the grey area non-securitizing or neutral. Al Jazeera’s articles had a total of twenty-two visuals. Of the images where faces were visible, five were of women and/or children and three of men/mixed. Al Jazeera’s articles did not use images of Suu Kyi or other politicians, in contrast to BBC which used eight images of this character. None of Al Jazeera’s videos included were of non-securitizing character. In fact, the majority of the videos clearly visually securitized the Rohingya through the portrayal of their individual and detailed suffering. In contrast, a majority of the BBC’s videos were of non-securitizing character, as they focused on the portrayal of Suu Kyi or depicted the Rohingya in a way that did not clearly ‘speak security’. The sample from BBC’s articles included in total thirty-five visuals. Of the images of identifiable Rohingya, two were of women and/or children and two were of men/mixed. BBC did not incorporate any images of a large group of people with unidentifiable faces whilst Al Jazeera had two images that fell into this category.

The categorisation of *articles* led to the result of Al Jazeera having seven in the first category, two in the second and one in the third. Respectively, three of BBC’s visually securitized the Rohingya, two were “mixed” and five were of the last categorisation’s character. Certain videos were categorised as visually securitizing, whilst the article(s) they were situated in were categorised differently. This was due to the fact that the *sum* of the article portrayed a different “message” than a certain visual. The visuals were continuously placed in their intertextuality and inter-visibility, which led to this categorisation.

Suu Kyi was often described as a peace icon by the BBC, referring to her as a “Nobel Peace Prize Laureate” in several articles. The gendered logics in these findings was deemed to be the prevalence of women and children in both news outlets’ videos, particularly in Al Jazeera’s images. The few neocolonial logics

that could be found were BBC's use of the name "Burma" in several articles as well as the video with Cate Blanchett, which portrayed a "white saviour" message. The "identifiable victim" was present in both outlets, more so in Al Jazeera's sample. Few images were of large groups of people with unidentifiable faces, only fleetingly depicted in certain videos and in two of Al Jazeera's images.

6. Conclusion

Difficulties arose whilst analysing these articles, due to the fact that the visual and textual discourse were at times ambiguous. Articles which constituted the Rohingya as in threatened and simultaneously incorporated visual and textual discourse that did not ‘speak security’ resulted in a “mixed” categorisation. An awareness of this complexity should therefore be noted, as the polysemic nature of the visuals and the at times contradicting textual discourse does not ensure a straight-forward result. However, this “mixed” outcome is also a result. It is interpreted as visually securitizing the Rohingya to *a certain extent*, which perhaps reflects the wider Western policy discourse. The general “trend” of Western disinterest towards the minority and the events of 2017 have been paralleled with condemnations of the atrocities. The use of visuals of politicians, particularly of Suu Kyi, can be interpreted as deflecting responsibility, framing the issue as “their problem”. Regardless of the “mixed” results, a majority of both the BBC’s visuals and articles fell into the category of non-securitizing, due to the portrayal of other aspects than the personal tragedies of the Rohingya. The textual discourse focused mainly on the various statements from Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s military, The Gambia and commissioners and investigators of the UN, mentioning the Rohingya’s oppression fleetingly and broadly, without much detail or individuality. Despite the presence of suffering in certain videos, the articles in whole gave the reader an understanding of the Rohingya which was mainly from a “top-down” political perspective, far-removed from the reality of the genocide, refugee camp and everyday life of a Rohingya Muslim.

A majority of Al Jazeera’s articles and videos were categorised as clearly visually securitizing, as they drew on gender, children, individuality, suffering and immediacy in their representation. Despite the fact that the analytical framework did not explicitly mention the impact of children, it was assumed that visuals of children furthers the visual securitization, as they evoke emotion and compassion. All visual and textual discourse have not clearly ‘spoken security’ however. As with the BBC, multiple articles gave an overview of the international “debate” regarding the FFM, the ICJ case as well as incorporating Myanmar’s defence, which claimed that the allegations were false and that the Rohingya militants were to blame. Nonetheless, the overall focus was on the dire situation for the Rohingya, portrayed through detailed and personal stories, a pattern of dominant imagery of women and children and depicting issues ranging from famine, poverty, “genocide cards”, trafficking, torture and rape.

By analysing the constitutions of the visuals, the patterns of dominant imagery and discourse, and the use of Hansen’s model and definition, an answer to the

research question was found. The question was: *How have the Rohingya been represented and potentially visually securitized in the BBC and Al Jazeera between 2017-2019?* The answer is that the Rohingya have been represented by the BBC mainly through discussing the political repercussions and statements regarding the genocide allegations, drawing on “mixed” visual and textual discourses which generally lacked individuality, identification and suffering. A majority of the visuals and articles were categorised as non-securitizing, therefore leading to the conclusion that the Rohingya were not visually securitized by the BBC. Al Jazeera has clearly represented the Rohingya as threatened and in need of immediate defence, according to the categorisation of articles, videos and constitutions of the images. One can therefore state that a visual securitization has taken place in Al Jazeera’s sample.

In conclusion, the findings can be understood as reflecting the wider policy discourse. This is not to say that The Gambia filed the lawsuit because of Al Jazeera’s visual securitization, it can merely be interpreted as a *reflection* of the wider Muslim policy discourse. As identification is a crucial aspect of visual securitization, a global South news outlet with strong Muslim influences would reasonably depict the Rohingya Muslims as threatened and in need of immediate defence due to the happenings in Myanmar and Bangladesh. In turn, the BBC’s non-securitizing and “mixed” visual and textual discourse perhaps reflects Western inaction. Despite various heads of states’ official statements condemning the genocide, the global North’s disinterest is clearly present. Lastly, this thesis contributes to visual securitization theory by illustrating the need to explore the comprehension of videos and their potential to visually securitize. Theorising the “mixed” areas is also needed, to fully cover the way news outlets can, or cannot, speak security. The findings contribute to the explanation of how the Rohingya came to be defined as not being worthy of Western protection, by illustrating that a major news outlet such as the BBC, has made systematic semiotic choices to represent political implications instead of the urgency of the Rohingya’s dire situation.

Who is worthy of security is partially determined by images, which in turn are reproduced by news outlets. The linkage between international (in)action, images, and their immediate textual discourse have illuminated the importance of analysing what is being seen. This thesis encourages awareness of images’ performative power, to avoid repeating the mistakes of Rwanda and Myanmar.

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